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The American Institute of Sacred Literature

SUGGESTIONS FOR LEADERS OF BIBLE CLUBS USING THE OUTLINE COURSES

"The first great and permanent service that the Old Testament renders to a man is that it presents to him personalities worthy of the profoundest reverence.

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"The Old Testament affords even the most unfortunately circumstanced among us characters which are so great, and whose greatness lies so patently in their relation to God, that we are inevitably led to ascribe to them supreme worth. It is the patient scholarship of our times that has rendered their individualities intelligible and self-consistent. It has made plain to us the greatness of these men." By leaders of classes much help may be secured from the Club Leader's Exchange, conducted by GEORGIA LOUISE CHAMBERLIN, in the BIBLICAL WORLD.

THE SOCIAL AND ETHICAL TEACHING OF JESUS¹

For the sake of condensation it has been necessary to combine two subjects in the work of the month, either of which would furnish ample work for the entire period. The first of these, "Jesus' Teaching concerning Wealth," gives scope for the consideration of questions connected with the production, use, and abuse of wealth, as well as its proportionate valuation in relation to the other good things of life.

The oft-repeated cry of the business or professional man, "I do not care for politics," raises the question whether there is an obligation on every man as a member of a Christian commonwealth so to interest himself in politics as to bring about an acquaintance with political movements in their relation to Christian ideals and Christian conduct, and a supreme interest in the evolution of a lasting Christian state.

The fact that Jesus presents no definite program for government or for politics makes it all the more important that we should search his words and his life to find to what conclusion his idealism and his

¹ A textbook, Mathews, *Social and Ethical Teaching of Jesus*, may be secured from the American Institute of Sacred Literature, for 50 cents, postage 4 cents.

sound judgment led him in his own attitude toward the ruling powers of his day, and what principles he laid down which might form a basis for a Christian state today.

A program covering the first subject may be: (1) How did the Old Testament sages regard riches? Quotations by members of the class under heads (a) rich men favored of God, (b) ill-gotten riches, (c) the selfish rich, (d) the generous rich. (2) Stories indicative of Jesus' attitude toward the poor. (3) Stories showing the attitude of Jesus toward the rich. (4) Examples of men of our own day who have used wealth as an opportunity for Christian service. (5) The attitude of Jesus toward labor.

Questions for discussion.—(1) Did the riches or poverty of a person, as such, influence the relations of Jesus toward that person? To what extent does it influence us as individuals? As a church? (2) Is the wealth of our community doing all that it should for the uplifting of the community?

A program upon the second subject of the month may consider: (1) Political conditions in Palestine at the time of Jesus. (2) Jesus as a citizen. (3) Some of the state activities of our own country which may be called distinctly Christian. (4) The application of the principles of Jesus to qualifications for political suffrage. (5) The attitude of Jesus toward the opportunities for political power which came to him. Would his answer have been different in democratic America of today?

Subject for discussion.—Are the governments of the world progressing toward Jesus' ideal of a Christian state?

REFERENCE READING

Chadwick, *Social Relations in the Light of Christianity*, pp. 37-49, 136-41, 206-12; Hall, *Social Solutions*, pp. 349-58, 176-244; Mathews, *Social Teaching of Jesus*, chaps. v and vi; Peabody, *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*, chaps. iv and v; Gladden, *Social Salvation*, chaps. ii and iii; Clark, *The Ideal of Jesus*, chaps. ix and xii; Heuver, *Jesus' Teaching concerning Wealth*, chaps. vi to xi.

Articles will be found in Hastings' *Bible Dictionary* and Hastings' *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* under the following titles: "Beggar," "Benevolence," "Giving," "Interest," "Money," "Palestine," "Poor," "Poverty," "Riches," "Trades," "Trade and Commerce," "Tax," "Tribute," "Usury," "Wealth."

THE ORIGIN AND RELIGIOUS TEACHING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS¹

The leader of the class in this course of study is confronted each month with a new task. A knowledge of the historical background of Israel's literature in the period before the exile does not furnish the necessary data for understanding the message which comes from the exile itself; nor is the historical study of the exile sufficient to equip one for an appreciation of the literature of the period following the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus, a period in which the Jews were drifting sometimes in small groups and occasionally in more notable companies back to their ruined city.

The biblical accounts of some of the more important expeditions are found in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, but the accounts are confused and frequently inconsistent in details. The impression which it is important that the class should receive is that of the changing religious views indicated by the increased emphasis upon ritualism and the intensity of the religious fervor of the literature. Ritualism in Israel was not the expression of decadence in religious life, but of the passionate striving after that supreme holiness which might eventually bring the fulfilment of Israel's dream, a theocratic kingdom over which Jehovah should rule and through which the whole world should turn to Israel's God.

It was in the hope of establishing such a state that desperate efforts were made to rebuild the city, to exclude from it all foreigners, and to establish an authorized program of religious life which would insure the individual and the nation from mistakes, and guarantee the sinlessness which seemed to the religious leaders of that day the necessary preparation for the coming of Jehovah.

Just as closely, therefore, as in previous periods is the work of historian, prophet, lawmaker, and poet bound to the history of the period. In our rapid survey of one hundred years we shall discover a new temple, a new lawbook, and a new gospel, in the recognition of the fact that Jehovah's interest, compassion, and forgiveness are not offered to Israel alone, but to any nation which will accept it, in all the world.

A program for the first meeting may be: (1) Early struggles in the new city. (2) The prophets and the temple. (3) Ezra's expedition. (4) Ezra's attempt at reform. (5) Reading of three Psalms which may have come from this period.

¹ A course book may be secured from the American Institute of Sacred Literature, *The Origin and Religious Teaching of the Old Testament Books*, by Georgia Louise Chamberlin. 50 cents, postage 4 cents.

Subject for discussion.—Had Ezra's reform failed would the religion of Jehovah have gradually disappeared?

The class will find it a most interesting task to arrange the book of Ruth as a drama and present it very simply with appropriate costumes.

A second program may take up: (1) Nehemiah and his expedition. (2) Nehemiah's difficulties as a governor. (3) The new lawbook; its character; its relation to previous lawbooks (as Deuteronomy); its reception. (4) Malachi as a man of his times. (5) Joel's problem. (6) A résumé of the book of Jonah and its gospel.

Subject for discussion.—How does increasing ritualism usually affect prophetic activity or power, that is, the sermon?

The Book of Esther will lend itself to dramatic action even better than Ruth. Let the class experiment along these lines.

REFERENCE READING

Kent, *History of the Jewish People*; H. P. Smith, *Old Testament History*, pp. 344-412; Wade, *Old Testament History*, pp. 465-511; Cornill, *Prophets of Israel*, 145-70; George Adam Smith, *Book of the Twelve Prophets*, Book II, pp. 225-543; Cheyne, *Religion of Israel after the Exile*; Bennett, *The Religion of the Post-Exilic Prophets*; Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, pp. 42-59, 307-13, 321-25, 343-58, 478-88, 516-54; McFadyen, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 27-36, 183-88, 196-200, 219-38, 290-94, 310-16, 332-56. Volumes on nearly all the books under consideration in this study are to be found in the series *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, *The Century Bible*, and *The Modern Reader's Bible*.

Articles will be found in both the four-volume and one-volume editions of the Hastings' *Bible Dictionary* under the following titles: "Chronicles," "Ezra," "Nehemiah," "Book of Nehemiah," "Haggai," "Book of Haggai," "Zechariah," "Book of Zechariah," "Book of Malachi," "Leviticus," "Esther," "Book of Esther," "Ruth," "Book of Ruth," "Book of Joel," "Book of Jonah," "Persia," "Darius," "Artaxerxes," "Susa."